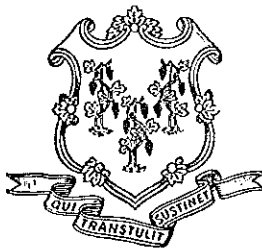


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Testimony on Senate Bill 640
Committee on Transportation Public Hearing
February 20, 2013

Chairman Maynard, Chairman Guerrero, members of the Committee: thank you for taking the time to consider my testimony this morning.

It brings me great pleasure to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 640, "An Act Concerning the Safe Driving Practices Course for New Drivers over the Age of Eighteen."

This issue was brought to my attention late last year by Mr. Michael Ash, a constituent of mine from the City of Meriden. Mr. Ash has decades of experience as a Driving Education Instructor here in Connecticut, and as a result, possesses considerable expertise on the effectiveness of driver's education programs. Given the importance of this issue to Mr. Ash, I felt it appropriate to file this legislation on his behalf.

Senate Bill 640 serves to remedy several issues with regards to home-based driver training, particularly for individuals 18 years old or over. Currently, any resident who opts for home training is required to enroll in an eight-hour Safe Driving Practices course, which is administered not by the Department of Motor Vehicles, but rather by commercial driving schools, who charge a rate of \$125 for students to enroll.

This fee has proven problematic for several reasons:

- First, most other states do not charge anything for enrollment into comparable mandatory courses. According to Mr. Ash, only New York State also imposes a fee for similar instruction, with the amount being a more modest \$40 for a five-hour course.
- Second, imposing this fee has proven an economic burden for prospective drivers coming from lower-income families, and as such serves as a deterrent to individuals who would otherwise be able to obtain a Connecticut Driver's License. This negatively impacts their ability to secure meaningful employment as it limits the jobs for which they are eligible and to which they can commute.
- Finally, each \$125 charge is not being collected by the State through the DMV, but instead is going directly to private driving schools. As a result, this mandatory fee is providing no fiscal benefit to the State while simultaneously presenting a hardship for those individuals who can least afford it.

In addition to the issues surrounding the cost of Safe Driving Practices, the course's curriculum itself currently does little to assess the aptitude of individuals seeking their license through home instruction. After completing their eight hours of course instruction, a prospective driver has fulfilled their obligation simply by attending the Safe Driving Practices course without any process to determine if the student has obtained an adequate understanding of the curriculum and can apply these lessons in the real world. This lack of assessment seems opposed to the goal of ensuring our drivers have the necessary preparation as they seek their license.

I proposed Senate Bill 640 so that the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles will conduct a review of the affordability and effectiveness of the Safe Driving Practices course and

develop alternatives to the manner in which it is currently implemented. I would like consideration given to an attendee's ability to pay, the State's ability to offer a less expensive and a more convenient option than the current arrangement. I would also like to see this review result in the administration of a final exam that enrollees must pass to complete the course with issuance of a driving permit as the product of a successful exam.

In the interest of fairness to all citizens throughout Connecticut and to ensure that our residents have the requisite training to be safe and effective drivers, I urge you to report SB 640 favorably out of Committee. I understand that Mr. Ash will also be submitting testimony on the importance of this issue. If you have any questions or comments regarding this legislation or my testimony, please feel free to contact me directly at any time.

